



THE LIBERTY BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

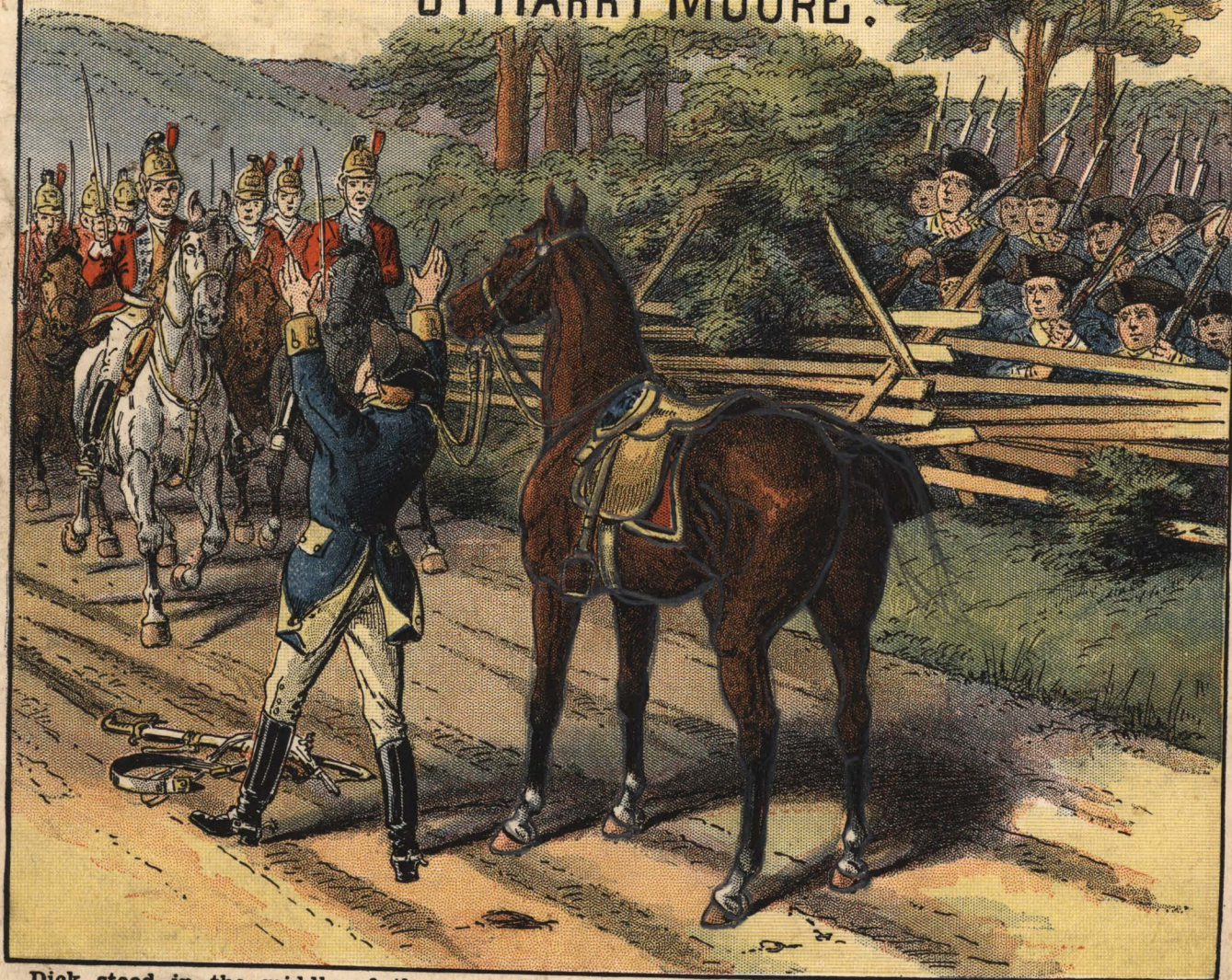
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No. 34.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 23, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' FAKE SURRENDER: OR THE RUSE THAT SUCCEEDED. BY HARRY MOORE.



Dick stood in the middle of the road directly opposite his "Liberty Boys," and as the British Dragoons advanced threw up his hands and cried: "I surrender!"

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CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG SPY.

It was October in the year 1777.

The patriot army was at Whitemarsh, about thirteen miles from Philadelphia.

A week had elapsed since the battle of Germantown.

In this battle the patriot army had surprised the British, and but for an unforeseen happening would undoubtedly have defeated them and put them to rout.

On the morning of the battle there was a heavy fog.

One section of the patriot army mistook another section for the British and attacked their comrades.

Being thus between two fires, the section of the patriot army thus attacked became demoralized.

The men stood the double fire as long as they could and then fled.

This was the start and it was not long before the alarm spread throughout the ranks of the patriot army.

Soon a general retreat was begun, and what had promised to be a successful attack was a failure.

There is no doubt, however, that the battle of Germantown had good results.

It gave General Howe a good scare.

It was a lesson to him.

It showed him very conclusively that the patriot army was dangerous.

It proved to his satisfaction that in General Washington, the commander-in-chief of the patriot army, he had an opponent worthy of his best efforts.

General Howe realized that he would have to be cautious.

But for an accident, his army would have been defeated and put to rout at Germantown.

General Howe withdrew his forces from Germantown and had them take up their quarters in Philadelphia.

Thus matters stood one week after the battle of Germantown.

It was about the middle of the afternoon.

General Washington sat at a table in his room in the house in which he had his headquarters.

The commander-in-chief was plunged in thought.

His forehead was wrinkled.

As he sat thus, there came the sound of footsteps in the hall outside.

Then the door opened and an orderly announced:

"Dick Slater, your excellency."

The orderly stepped back and a handsome youth of perhaps eighteen or nineteen years entered the room.

General Washington looked up as Dick entered the room.

A pleased look appeared on his face.

"Ah, Dick, I am glad to see you," he said.

Then he pointed to a chair.

"Be seated."

Dick took the seat indicated.

He looked at the commander-in-chief, inquiringly.

"You sent for me, your excellency?" he asked.

"Yes, Dick, I have some work for you."

The face of the youth lighted up.

"I am glad of that," he said.

The commander-in-chief did not seem to hear him.

He had again dropped his eyes to the floor and was pondering.

Presently he looked up.

"Dick," he said, "I will tell you what I wish you to do. It is this: I wish you to go to Philadelphia and find out all you can regarding the plans of General Howe, the British commander-in-chief."

"Very well, your excellency, I will do so."

"I wish you to find out most particularly what General Howe's intentions are regarding Forts Mercer and Mifflin."

"Very well, sir."

"It is important that we should hold those forts, Dick."

"I should judge so, sir."

"Yes, indeed, it is very important. If we can hold those forts we can keep General Howe's ships away from Philadelphia; and if we can keep the ships away, it will be impossible for the British to remain in Philadelphia long, as it will be impossible for them to get supplies."

"True," agreed Dick. "It would be a big task to bring the supplies overland from New York."

"Yes, indeed; and we could head them off and keep the supplies from reaching Philadelphia."

"It will be a hard matter to hold the fort, don't you think, your excellency?" asked Dick.

"I fear so, Dick. However, if I can learn what General Howe's intentions are in the matter I may be enabled to lend the forts assistance sufficient so that they will be able to hold the British at bay."

"I hope so, sir. Well, I will do my best. I will go to Philadelphia and learn all that I possibly can."

"Good! When will you start?"

"I will leave here so as to get into Philadelphia just after dark."

"That is a good idea. You are less liable to be noticed, and a person on a mission like yours does not wish to attract attention."

"No, indeed."

Dick and the commander-in-chief conversed for quite a while, and then the youth took his leave.

Dick Slater was, as we have said, a youth of perhaps eighteen years of age.

He was the captain of a company of youths of about his own age.

These youths were known as "The Liberty Boys of '76."

They had already made a reputation for themselves.

They had distinguished themselves by wonderful fighting and the exhibition of indomitable courage on the battlefield.

Dick had also made himself famous in another way.

He had done a great deal of successful spy work.

He had earned the title of "The Champion Spy of the Revolution."

Another of the "Liberty Boys," Bob Estabrook by name, had done good work as a spy, also.

The "Liberty Boys" had certainly been of great value to the cause of Liberty.

Dick Slater, while a cool, calm, self-contained youth, was yet as daring a youth as ever lived, and was brave to recklessness.

He liked spy work.

The great danger connected with the work of a spy seemed to make it all the more fascinating to Dick.

He was always glad of a chance to go on a spying expedition.

Naturally, therefore, his face was beaming when he entered the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

"I see it in your face, Dick!" cried a bright, handsome youth.

This youth was Bob Estabrook.

"See what in my face, Bob?" asked Dick.

"That you have been ordered to go on a spying expedition."

Dick laughed.

"You're a pretty good face-reader, Bob."

"I knew it! Where are you going, Dick?"

"To Philadelphia."

"Of course, I might have known it. When are you going?"

"This evening."

"This evening, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you are going to spy on General Howe?"

"Yes."

A serious look came over Bob's face.

"Say, Dick," he said, "it's going to be dangerous work entering Philadelphia now."

"There will be some danger, Bob."

"Some danger! Why, you old rascal, you know you will be taking your life in your hands. The city is overrun with redcoats."

"Yes, that's true."

Dick spoke coolly.

He did not seem to be daunted by the outlook.

"You had better let some of us fellows go along with you, Dick."

Dick shook his head.

"Let me go, anyway, Dick."

Again Dick shook his head.

"No, Bob," he said, "I think it will be best for me to go alone."

"Why so?" in a disappointed tone.

"For the reason that one person is less likely to attract attention than two, and secrecy is the main thing, you know."

"I know that, but supposing you got into trouble; two of us could fight better than one."

"Two might do a little more damage, Bob, but it would not effect the results. No, I will go alone."

Bob was disappointed.

His face showed this, but he did not insist further.

"You must be careful, Dick," he said.

"Oh, I'll be careful, Bob."

"Don't let those redcoats gobble you up."

"I won't; at any rate, I'll do my best not to."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know."

"It depends on circumstances, eh?"

"Yes. If I am successful in finding out what I wish to learn, quickly, I will not be gone long; otherwise I may not be back for some time."

"I hope you'll find it out quickly, Dick. I shall feel anxious during the whole of the time you are absent."

"You needn't, Bob. I will be very careful."

"I know, Dick, you will be careful enough, but Philadelphia is so full of redcoats that I don't see how you can escape getting into trouble, no matter how careful you may be."

Dick reassured Bob and the other "Liberty Boys" as best he could.

He told them that he would be very careful.

He began making preparations for the trip.

He doffed his Continental uniform and donned a suit of citizen's clothing.

The suit was a rough one, such as was worn by farmer boys of the period.

The ragged clothing, rough shoes and old, slouch hat, made a great change in Dick's appearance.

Dick's face was as handsome, his eyes as bright as before, but his general appearance was changed greatly.

Then Dick looked to his weapons.

He saw that his pistols were primed and in good condition.

When he had completed his preparations he went out and saddled and bridled his horse.

"Aren't you going to wait for supper, Dick?" asked Bob, who had accompanied him.

"No, Bob, I'll take supper in Philadelphia."

"Jove! but you'll be hungry before you get there."

"Oh, not so very. I can stand it."

Dick re-entered the quarters, gave Bob and the other "Liberty Boys" some instructions, and then bidding them good-by, went out and mounted his horse.

The "Liberty Boys" came out to see him off.

As he rode away they gave him a cheer.

They loved their brave, young commander.

He was so good to them and was so kind and considerate that they could not help it.

There was not one among them who would not have died for Dick.

It was this fact which made them such dangerous opponents in a battle.

Wherever Dick led, they would follow; and they would stay till he ordered them to leave.

This had been proven on more than one occasion.

Dick knew how he was regarded by the youths, and it gave him great pleasure.

He was not bigoted, but was proud of the fact that he had the confidence of the commander-in-chief of the patriot army and the love of each and every "Liberty Boy," and of every patriot soldier who knew him.

It was not yet quite dark.

As the "Liberty Boys" gave utterance to the cheer, Dick half turned in the saddle and waved his hat.

Then he urged his horse to a gallop and rode away in the direction of Philadelphia.

Three-quarters of an hour later he rode into Germantown.

Dick did not intend to stop in Germantown.

He was destined to do so, however.

About half way down the main street of Germantown was a tavern.

When Dick was almost opposite the tavern he heard a sound of scuffling, and then a voice cried out, in accents of terror:

"Help! Help! Murder! Help!"

CHAPTER II.

DICK HANDLES SOME REDCOATS ROUGHLY.

Dick was somewhat startled.

There was no doubt that the owner of the voice was terribly frightened.

Dick was not the youth to ignore a call for help.

He leaped from his horse, instantly.

Throwing the bridle rein over the hitching-post, Dick hastened toward the door of the tavern.

Dick's quick eye had noted that four horses were hitched to the rack in front of the tavern.

Four horses meant four riders.

Thus Dick reasoned, and he expected to find not to exceed half a dozen within the tavern.

Reaching the door, Dick opened it and entered.

He found himself in the barroom.

Dick's quick eyes took in the situation in an instant.

Four men were fighting one.

The four were redcoats, while the one, so Dick judged, was the tavern-keeper.

The tavern-keeper was behind the wooden bar, which extended along one side of the room, but the redcoats had succeeded in getting hold of him and had pulled him down on top of the bar and were giving him a terrible pounding.

The tavern-keeper was yelling, lustily.

Doubtless he thought the redcoats intended to kill him.

It is possible they might have done so, for they seemed very angry; and redcoats held human life very cheaply, especially if the life happened to be that of an American.

Dick had no idea what the trouble was, of course, nor did he stop to inquire.

It was sufficient that four men were beating one.

Dick leaped across the room.

"You cowardly scoundrels!" he cried. "I'll teach you a lesson in fair play!"

As Dick spoke, he seized two of the redcoats by the coat-collars and gave them a jerk.

Dick was very strong, and he exerted all his strength.

The result was that the redcoats were jerked away from their victim and thrown, sprawling, to the floor.

They scooted along and did not stop until they struck the wall.

Without waiting to see what became of them, Dick seized the other two redcoats by the coat-collars.

A strong jerk and a swing, and these two went after the others.

The landlord struggled to his feet.

His face was badly battered.

"What's the trouble?" asked Dick.

"Those scoundrels were trying to murder me," was the reply.

"Why did they attack you?"

"They drank a lot of wine and refused to pay for it."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yes; and when I demanded payment, they grabbed me and began beating me."

Dick turned toward the redcoats.

He was just in time.

They had regained their feet and were on the point of rushing upon him.

That they were angry at Dick, may well be understood.

That they would harm him if they could, was amply proven by the looks upon their faces.

Dick expected that the fellows would draw weapons.

He was glad to see that in this he was mistaken.

The redcoats probably thought that, being four to one, they would have no trouble in giving the one a good thrashing.

True, he had thrown them across the room with seeming ease, but they reasoned that he could not have done so had he not taken them by surprise.

So the four fellows rushed at Dick, without drawing weapons.

This suited the youth first-rate.

He had no fear of the fellows, although they were four to one.

He had more than once come forth successful from a conflict with four or five men, and these fellows, as he saw, were about half drunk, which would make it much less difficult for him to protect himself against them.

The men rushed to the attack, with evident confidence:

They thought to crush Dick down with superior force. The youth soon taught them differently.

As the redcoats came within reach of Dick, his fists shot out.

Crack! Spat!

Down went two of the redcoats.

They struck the floor, with a crash which shook the building.

Again Dick's fists shot out.

Crack! Spat!

Down went the other two redcoats.

They fell across the bodies of their comrades, and for a few moments the four lay there in a half-dazed, temporarily helpless condition.

The tavern-keeper was delighted.

"Good!" he cried. "Give it to them, young fellow. They're getting just what they deserve."

"I guess you're right about that," said Dick.

"I know I am, the scoundrels! I believe they would have murdered me."

"They might have done so. Certainly they would not have been restrained by any conscientious scruples."

"No; for I don't believe one of them has a conscience. Look out! They're getting up again."

They were struggling to their feet.

There was a look of surprise and wonder, as well as anger, on the fellows' faces.

It was evident that they could not understand how one person, and that person a mere youth, seemingly, could have downed the four of them so easily.

The redcoats, on reaching their feet, did not immediately renew the attack.

They stood still and stared at Dick.

Dick met their gaze, calmly and unflinchingly.

He stood leaning lightly against the bar, his arms folded across his chest.

There was a quizzical look in his eyes and a half-smile on his face.

Presently one of the redcoats spoke.

"Say," he said, "who are you, anyway?"

"Who am I?"

Dick's tone was cool and calm.

"Yes, who are you?"

"A man."

"Humph!" the redcoat grunted, "I wouldn't have believed it if you hadn't proved it. You look more like a boy."

Dick smiled.

"I am a boy," he replied.

"You must be the 'Old Boy,' then," growled one of the redcoats.

"What's your name, and where did you come from?" asked the redcoat who had first spoken.

"That is my affair," replied Dick.

"You mean you won't tell us."

"That is what I mean."

"Say, Jack, I'll bet he is a blamed rebel," said another of the redcoats. "Let's make him own up to it."

Dick smiled, ironically.

"Go ahead, if you think you can do it," he said, quietly.

Dick could see that the redcoats were angry.

He knew that they were aching to have revenge on him.

He did not believe they would be willing to give it up as it now stood.

Believing thus, he kept an eye on them.

It was well that he did so.

Suddenly, at a gesture from the leader, the four redcoats leaped forward.

Dick was not taken by surprise.

He knocked two of the redcoats down, and by a quick leap to one side evaded the other two.

Then he whirled and dealt them a couple of strong blows.

Down they went, with a crash.

The feat of flooring the four redcoats did not seem to be a difficult one for Dick.

The redcoats lay where they had fallen, for a few seconds, and then, one after another, they climbed to their feet.

Dick was watching them closely.

He felt sure that the time had now come when the redcoats would have recourse to their weapons.

In this he was right.

As soon as they had gained their feet they drew their swords.

Before they could rush forward, however, Dick drew two pistols from a belt around his waist, underneath his coat, and leveled them at the redcoats' heads.

"Stand where you are!" Dick cried, sternly. "The first man who takes a step forward, dies!"

The four men halted and stood irresolute.

Dick's tone was firm and determined.

The redcoats felt that he meant what he said.

There was a look in the youth's eyes which said, "shoot!"

The men looked at Dick and then at each other.

There was a baffled look on their faces.

It was evident that they did not know what to do.

Dick, leaning against the bar, with the pistols extended, made an impressive appearance.

He looked dangerous.

Dick did not say a word, but simply waited.

"You had better put those pistols down," finally remarked the leader of the redcoats.

"You think so?" coldly.

"I do."

"I don't. On the other hand, I think that you had better put your sabers back in their scabbards. I might take it into my head to open fire at any moment."

This evidently frightened the redcoats.

The redcoats glanced at each other irresolutely.

Then, slowly and reluctantly, they replaced their sabers in the scabbards.

"Come," said the leader, "let us be going."

He led the way to the door, the other three following.

Reaching the door he opened it, but stepped aside and let his comrades pass out ahead of him.

He turned toward Dick.

"I'll settle with you for this, later on, young fellow!" he said, threateningly.

"Any time and place you choose," said Dick, quietly.

The redcoat gave utterance to an angry growl and stepped out of doors, closing the door behind him.

Scarcely had he done so when Dick gave a start.

"My horse!" he exclaimed. "Those scoundrels may try to take him away with them!"

"It would be jest like them," said the tavern-keeper.

At a bound Dick was at the door.

Taking both pistols in one hand, he opened the door with the other.

He leaped out of doors.

His fears were realized.

One of the redcoats was in the act of taking the rein off the post.

Had Dick been a few seconds later in appearing the redcoat would have been away with his horse.

"Stop that!" cried Dick. "You touch that bridle rein at your peril!"

Without a word, the redcoat turned and ran toward his own horse.

Untying it, he leaped into the saddle.

The other three men had already mounted.

They turned their horses' heads and dashed away in the direction of Philadelphia.

The tavern-keeper had followed Dick to the door.

"They'd have taken your horse if you hadn't thought of it just when you did," the man said.

"They undoubtedly would," agreed Dick. Then he continued:

"I guess I will be going on."

"You must not go until I have thanked you for what you have done for me," said the tavern-keeper.

Then he thanked Dick, heartily.

"Don't mention it," the youth said. "I was only too glad to be able to render you assistance."

"I take it that you don't like redcoats, anyway," the tavern-keeper said, shrewdly.

Dick smiled.

"I don't think it a good plan to talk too much," he said.

The tavern-keeper nodded, approvingly.

"That's right," he agreed. "I don't mind telling you that I don't like redcoats myself, however, and I will say that if ever at any time you are in this vicinity and need a haven of refuge, you have only to come to me."

"Thank you," said Dick. "I will remember."

Then he shook hands with the tavern-keeper, and, mounting his horse, rode away.

As he did so, the tavern-keeper called out:

"You had better keep your eyes open, young fellow; those scoundrels may take it into their heads to stop somewhere down the road and lie in wait for you."

"True," called back Dick. "I'll look out for them."

Dick galloped onward.

It was now quite dark.

He could see nothing of the redcoats, which was not strange, as he could not see more than thirty yards in front of him.

Presently Dick came to a little stretch of timber.

As he entered it there came the crack! crack! of pistol shots, and bullets whistled past his ears.

CHAPTER III.

A DIFFICULT FEAT.

Dick understood the matter at once.

The redcoats had lain in wait for him.

Doubtless they had suspected that he was on his way to Philadelphia.

Taking it for granted, they had stopped and gone into ambush, with the intention of getting revenge on the youth who had handled them so roughly.

It was so dark that they had been unable to take good aim.

It was owing to this fact that they had missed Dick.

The youth was riding a horse which he had owned for more than a year.

The horse was a magnificent black, with Arabian blood in his veins.

Dick had captured the animal from the British on Long Island.

A more intelligent horse never lived.

He seemed to have as much sense as a human being.

In a time like the present, when the majority of horses would have become frightened and leaped and snorted, and given their owner lots of trouble, Major was never any trouble at all.

In the present instance Major gave Dick no trouble whatever.

He did not leap, snort or swerve from the road.

He continued galloping steadily onward.

Dick dropped the bridle rein over the pommel of the saddle, then he drew two pistols.

He leveled them, pointing the muzzles in the direction from which the flashes had come when he was fired upon.

Crack! crack!

A wild yell of pain went up from the point where the men were in ambush.

"Good!" thought Dick, as he thrust the pistols back in his belt. "I guess I hit one of the fellows, anyway."

Dick rode onward at a steady gallop.

He listened, occasionally, in the expectation of hearing sounds of pursuit.

Dick was confident the fellows would try to overhaul him.

They had been angry at him before for handling them so roughly in the tavern, and now that he had wounded or killed one of their number, they would be wild to revenge themselves upon him.

He listened, closely, and presently heard the clatter of hoof-beats behind him.

"They are after me," thought Dick. "I thought that they would be. Well, Major, we'll show them whether they can catch us or not."

Dick patted Major on the neck and spoke to him in a gentle, but commanding tone of voice.

The horse responded instantly.

He leaped forward at greatly increased speed.

Dick had no fear that they would overtake him.

He knew Major's powers.

He had never yet seen a horse that was the equal of Major in speed and endurance.

So far as this matter was concerned, Dick's mind was easy.

It was only three or four miles to Philadelphia, and it did not take a great while to reach there.

Dick had been in Philadelphia before.

He knew just where to go.

He made his way through the suburbs and was soon in the city proper.

Dick rode to a livery stable and left Major.

Then he made his way down the street.

Entering a tavern, Dick ordered supper.

When he had eaten he went out on the street once more.

Dick was on the alert.

He had come to the city for the purpose of learning what General Howe's intentions were.

He might learn something by listening to the talk of the redcoats on the streets.

There were plenty of soldiers on the streets.

The streets were thronged with people, and the redcoat uniforms were largely in evidence.

Dick made his way along the street.

He paused occasionally to listen to the talk of first one group and then another.

Dick knew where General Howe's headquarters were.

He gradually worked his way in that direction.

Half an hour from the time Dick had left the tavern where he had eaten supper, Dick found himself near the two and a half story brick house on High Street, occupied by General Howe.

Dick eyed the house with eager interest.

"If I could be in there an evening or two and hear the talk of General Howe and his officers, I would become possessed of information that would be of value to General Washington," thought Dick.

But that was the difficulty.

Getting into the house and overhearing what the officers said was something that seemed impossible of accomplishment.

This made the matter all the more attractive to Dick.

The more difficult a thing seemed, the more eager Dick was to attempt its accomplishment.

As Dick stood looking up at the building, he heard footsteps behind him and then some one gave him a shove.

"Out of the way, you lout!" remarked a gruff voice. "Stop your star-gazing and look about you enough so that you will be enabled to keep out of the way of officers of the king's army when they come along."

Dick was angry.

He was on the point of telling the "officer of the king's army" what he thought of him, but thought better of it.

It would not do for one dressed as he was to show anger or independence of spirit.

He was in the guise of a country youth, and a country youth would naturally be expected to submit to being shoved off the sidewalk without uttering a word of remonstrance.

Dick realized this and so said nothing.

He did a lot of thinking, however.

There were two of the officers.

They had not paused at all, but walked onward toward General Howe's headquarters.

"I tell you what it is, Stirling," Dick heard one of the officers say, "the first thing for us to do is to capture those forts. We must open up the Delaware so that our ships can come up to Philadelphia with supplies."

"That's what I think, Donop," the other officer replied. "That is the first thing to be done, and I hope that General Howe will turn his attention in that direction."

"So do I."

As Dick had suspected, the officers entered the house occupied by General Howe.

Dick was all excitement at once.

"They're going to hold a council," he said to himself.

"Jove! I wish I could overhear what is said."

Dick looked the building over carefully.

He wondered if it could be possible that he might be able to get in.

While he was wondering and pondering the situation, another brace of British officers passed him and entered the building.

"It's a council of war, sure enough," thought Dick.

"Jove! I must get in there, if such a thing is possible."

Dick made up his mind to make the attempt.

He was well aware of the fact that a spy could not gain much information without taking considerable risk.

He was determined to gain the information, however, no matter what the risk.

Dick realized that it would be impracticable to try to enter from the front.

The rear would be the best point for him as a basis of operations.

The building was detached.

On the right-hand side, looking from the front, was a sort of court separated from the sidewalk by a stone wall a foot or so higher than a man's head.

At the left-hand side of the building was a large yard in which trees of various kinds grew.

This yard was separated from the sidewalk by a picket fence about seven feet high.

Near the corner of the house there was a gate.

Dick made his way to this gate.

He stood there leaning against one of the gate-posts and watching his opportunity, and when no one was passing, or near enough to see what he was doing, he tried the gate to see if it was locked.

It was not.

This discovery pleased Dick.

He tried the gate and found that it opened inward.

He pushed it open a foot or so.

Then he watched his opportunity and when sure that no one was looking, he stepped through the opening into the yard and closed the gate.

"So far, so good," thought Dick.

He walked along the side of the building.

There were not many windows in the side wall.

Dick tried each window that he came to.

They were all fastened.

He was not surprised to find it thus.

He had expected it.

Presently he came to the end of the building.

Dick had some hope that he might be able to effect an entrance at the rear.

There was a door near the centre of the building, at the rear, and there were two windows on each side of it.

Dick first tried the door.

It was locked.

Then he tried the windows, one after another.

All were fastened.

Dick hardly knew what to do.

He pondered the situation.

Presently a thought struck Dick.

He walked to a corner of the building.

At this point there was a heavy wooden water-pipe which evidently led from the roof of the building to the ground, and then on into a cistern.

Dick took hold of this water-pipe and tested its strength.

The pipe was fastened to the wall by circular iron bands, the ends of which were imbedded in the mortar between the bricks.

Dick was confident that the water-pipe would easily hold his weight.

The difficulty would be in climbing the pipe—for this was what Dick thought of trying to do.

The pipe was round, perhaps four inches in diameter, and fitted tightly to the wall.

It would be a very difficult matter to climb it.

Dick was not daunted, however.

He was an expert climber.

He believed that he could make his way up the pipe without serious difficulty.

He decided to try it, at any rate.

Laying hold of the pipe he began to climb.

It was a rather difficult thing to do, but Dick was strong of arm and an expert climber, and he made his way upward slowly and surely.

When he had reached a height of ten or twelve feet, Dick paused to rest.

The iron bands around the wooden pipe were perhaps a quarter of an inch in thickness.

Dick got his feet on one of these bands and was thus enabled to sustain most of his weight in this manner.

After he had rested a few moments he started upward again.

He made his way upward another ten or twelve feet, then stopped and rested again.

As soon as he had rested sufficiently he climbed on upward.

This time he did not stop until he had reached the eaves and climbed over onto the sloping roof.

Again Dick paused and rested a few moments.

Then he climbed carefully up the sloping roof to and over the peak.

Dick had a well-defined object in view.

In looking up the building in front, Dick had noticed that there were a couple of dormer windows projecting from the roof.

Dick's idea was that it was not likely that the windows would be fastened—at least not securely.

They undoubtedly opened into the attic, and as they were for the purpose of letting light and air into the attic, the chances were that they would not be fastened.

Dick made his way carefully down the roof until he reached one of the dormer windows.

He tried the window.

It refused to open.

Dick noted that the window did not seem to offer very strong resistance, however.

He believed that he could force it open.

Before doing this, however, he decided to try the other dormer window.

It might not be fastened at all.

He made his way carefully across to the other window.

He pushed against it.

It swung inward.

The window was hinged at one side, and opened like a door.

"Good!" thought Dick. "I will soon be inside the house."

Dick crawled through the open window.

It was quite dark and he could see nothing, but he knew that he was in the attic and had a very good idea of his surroundings.

He felt his way across the floor.

Presently he found an open stairway.

He made his way down the stairway and at the bottom found a door.

He opened the door and looked out upon a dimly lighted hallway.

The faint sound of voices came to his ears.

"Good!" exclaimed Dick to himself. "I will get to hear what is said by General Howe and his officers in their council of war, after all."

CHAPTER IV.

DICK IS DISCOVERED.

Dick stole along the hall.

There was a candle burning at one end of the hall, which lighted it but dimly, however.

Dick had no difficulty in determining the room occupied by the British officers.

He could hear their voices plainly, and when he reached the door of the room he paused.

Dick dropped upon one knee and placed his ear to the keyhole.

He could hear and understand almost as well as if he was within the room.

Of course, the officers had no suspicion that there was any one within hearing distance, and they were talking freely.

As Dick had supposed, they were holding a council of war.

"The first thing to do," he heard a voice say, "is to reduce those two forts, down on the Delaware."

"You are right," said another voice. "We must have the Delaware opened up so that our ships can come up to the city and bring us the supplies which we will need."

"Yes," said another voice, "it ought not to be such a difficult task to capture the forts."

"Oh, I do not think it will be so very difficult."

This last was in the voice of General Howe, Dick was confident.

"Which fort do you think it advisable to attack first, General Howe?"

"I think it would be best to capture Fort Mercer first. Don't you think so, Colonel Donop?"

"I do, your excellency."

"And will you take command of the force which makes the attack?"

"I will. Nothing would please me better."

The speaker was Count Donop.

The brave young Hessian officer did not know it, of course, but in accepting the command of the force which was to attack Fort Mercer, he signed his own death-warrant.

Dick, as may well be supposed, listened to the conversation with great interest.

He remained at his post for perhaps an hour.

He listened to the talk of the officers and heard their plans in detail.

Dick could not but congratulate himself on his good fortune in getting to overhear the council of war.

He could return to General Washington with news of importance.

Dick could tell by the conversation of the officers that the council was about at an end.

Knowing that the officers would disperse presently, Dick decided that it was about time for him to leave.

He rose to his feet.

Just as he was on the point of turning and moving away, the door suddenly came open.

Dick and one of the British officers stood face to face.

Dick was surprised and somewhat vexed, but the British officer was paralyzed with astonishment.

He had opened the door with the intention of taking his leave, and to find a stranger standing just outside the door dazed him.

Dick was the first to recover from the surprise occasioned by the unexpected occurrence.

He acted instantly.

Quick as a flash he drew a pistol.

He stuck the pistol's muzzle full in the officer's face.

"Back! or I'll blow your brains out!" he said, in a low, intense tone of voice.

The officer leaped back in affright.

Seizing the door-knob, Dick jerked the door shut, with a slam.

Then he ran along the hallway as rapidly as he could.

He ran on his tiptoes so that the redcoats could not tell which way he went.

He reached the stairway leading up into the attic and passed through the doorway and closed the door before the redcoats got out into the hall.

They had been so dazed by the audacity of the youth that they had stood motionless for a few moments, unable to make a movement.

This gave Dick time to run along the hall and get through the doorway and close the door, as stated.

The officers were greatly excited when they did get out into the hallway.

Two or three had drawn swords, while the others held pistols in their hands.

They had expected to catch sight of Dick.

They were disappointed, of course.

Dick was not in sight.

The redcoats were puzzled.

They could not think where the intruder had gone.

"Where is he?" cried one.

"Where has the scoundrel gone?"

"He is a spy; he must not be allowed to escape!"

This from General Howe.

"We'll catch him; he cannot get away!" said Count Donop.

"And we'll kill him when we do catch him!" from another one of the officers.

"He must have gone downstairs," said General Stirling. "Come, we'll corner him."

He started toward the head of the stairs as he spoke.

Dick heard the excited voices of the officers.

He did not remain to try to hear what they said, however.

There was neither lock nor bolt to the door opening upon the attic stairway.

Dick feared that some of the officers would come to the attic stairway to search for him.

So he hastened up the stairway as quickly as he could, without making any noise.

He was none too quick.

He had just reached the attic when he heard the door at the foot of the stairs open.

Next he heard footsteps on the stairs.

"Some of them are coming up here, sure enough," thought Dick.

The youth did not wish to have an encounter with any of the redcoats if it could be avoided.

He had secured much valuable information, and his only desire now was to get away without any trouble.

He wished to make his escape and get out of the city and back to General Washington with the information.

Dick realized, of course, that now that the British officers knew they had been spied upon, they would alter their plans somewhat.

He knew, however, that they would alter some of the details only; the plan in general would remain the same.

About the only changes that would be made would be in the time of the attack on the fort.

It might be made a few days earlier or a week later than the date which had been decided upon.

This would not matter materially.

As soon as Dick heard the footsteps on the stairs, he made his way across the floor of the attic.

Dick crawled through the open dormer window.

As soon as he was out on the roof he pulled the window shut.

Then slowly and carefully he climbed up the sloping roof.

When he reached the peak he paused for an instant.

As he did so he heard the dormer window open.

Fearing that he would be seen, Dick threw his body over on the other side of the peak and began a cautious descent of the roof.

He moved diagonally downward toward the corner where the wooden water-pipe was.

Dick intended to make his way down to the ground.

When he reached the corner, however, and looked downward, he was given an unpleasant surprise.

Down in the back yard were at least half a dozen men.

One of them had a lantern and it was evident that they were on the lookout for the "rebel" spy.

"Jove!" thought Dick, "if I go down there I will be captured sure. What am I to do?"

Dick hardly knew what to do.

For once he was puzzled.

"I guess about the safest thing for me to do," the youth thought, "is to remain up here until they give up the search for me. Those fellows will certainly go back in doors then, and I can climb down and make my escape."

This seemed to be the best course he could pursue.

Dick kept his eye on the redcoats down in the back yard.

He did this so that in case they should, for any reason, go away he could slip down and get away.

Dick had forgotten all about the fellow who had followed him up into the attic.

Suddenly he was made remember it, however.

He was startled by hearing a triumphant voice exclaim:

"Aha! I've found you, my fine fellow!"

The voice seemed to come from above Dick.

The youth turned his head quickly and looked in the direction from which the voice sounded.

He saw a man's head projecting above the peak of the roof.

Dick realized that the head belonged to the man whose footsteps he had heard on the attic stairway.

Dick was in a tight place.

In fact, the situation was desperate.

He realized this.

The realization did not unnerve him, however.

Indeed, it did not seem to even excite him.

Dick was a philosophical youth.

There was nothing to be gained by becoming excited, so he addressed the man in the coolest imaginable manner.

"Yes, it looks as if you had found me," acknowledged Dick. "And now that you have, what are you going to do about it?"

"What am I going to do about it?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to make a prisoner of you."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"How are you going to go about it?"

"Well, first, I am going to invite you to come up here."

"Supposing I refuse?"

The officer laughed.

"I think this will induce you to change your mind," he said.

It was not so dark but Dick could see that the officer had drawn a pistol and leveled it.

"What is that you have there?" asked Dick. "A pistol?"

"It is; and if you refuse to obey my command I shall put a bullet through you!"

"Humph! Do you suppose you could hit me?"

"I rather think I can. I shall try, at any rate, unless you do as I tell you. Come on up here at once!"

While talking, Dick's mind had been active.

The youth realized that he was in a very tight place.

If he escaped it would require some very keen and clever work on his part.

A plan came into Dick's mind.

If only this one redcoat had come up into the attic, and if Dick could keep him from giving the alarm, he might be able to escape.

Dick felt sure that the officer would fire upon him if he did not obey the order which had been given.

Of course, a pistol shot would give the alarm, and even though Dick might not be hit by the bullet, the result could not be otherwise than that he would be captured.

It was necessary, therefore, that he should keep the redcoat from firing.

This could only be accomplished by obeying the officer's order.

Dick decided to do this.

"I am coming," Dick said.

"A very sensible decision," the officer said, approvingly.

Dick began making his way slowly and carefully up the sloping roof.

He shaped his course so that he would reach the peak at the point where the officer was.

When Dick was within a few feet of the top, he said:

"Please turn the muzzle of that pistol in some other direction. The thing might go off."

"Which would be bad for you, true," said the redcoat.

Dick was glad to see that he lowered the pistol, and turned the muzzle to one side.

"I'm going to go down the roof to the dormer window," the redcoat said, "and you must follow me; do you understand?"

"I understand," replied Dick.

Then, fearing that he might lose his opportunity, the youth acted.

He leaped upward, and throwing out his arms succeeded in grasping the redcoat by the throat.

This was the beginning of what proved to be a terrible struggle.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE ROOF.

The British officer was taken entirely by surprise.

He had not been expecting anything of the kind.

He had supposed that Dick really intended to give up.

The sudden and unexpected action of the youth, therefore, took him at a disadvantage.

The sudden shock of the attack startled him to such an extent that he involuntarily loosened his grasp on the pistol and it fell and went sliding down the roof.

Then the redcoat seized Dick's wrists and tried to tear the youth's grasp loose from his throat.

He realized that unless he succeeded in doing so he would soon be choked into insensibility.

Indeed, he feared that he might be choked to death.

He pulled and tugged at the youth's wrists with all his might.

It was of no avail.

He could not get Dick's hands loose.

Dick had a very strong grip.

His fingers were like steel.

The hold Dick had secured was a favorite hold of his.

During the time that he had been doing spy work, Dick had been engaged in a number of hand-to-hand combats.

He had made it a point, each and every time, to get his hands on the throat of his opponent; and when he had succeeded in doing so, the result of the combat had been practically settled.

It did not take this redcoat officer long to discover that he could not free his throat from Dick's grasp.

Having decided thus, he tried other tactics.

He made an effort to get his hands on Dick's throat.

The youth would not permit this, however.

He was too well aware of the deadliness of the hold to allow the redcoat to secure it on him.

He ducked his head forward and pressed his chin down upon his chest.

The officer could not get his hands to the youth's throat.

Another good point about the hold which Dick had secured was that it prevented the redcoat from crying out and thus giving the alarm.

The officer could not utter a sound.

The struggle which was taking place there on the roof was a rather strange one.

The redcoat officer was on one side of the peak of the roof and Dick was on the other.

As each was grasping the other, there was no danger that they would fall off of the roof.

The struggle, while a desperate one, was very quietly conducted.

Dick did not utter a word, and the redcoat could not do so.

Dick lay flat on his stomach, on the sloping roof, and remained as nearly motionless as possible.

The redcoat, who was now beginning to feel the necessity of getting some fresh air into his lungs, was doing some kicking and threshing about, however, in his efforts to get his breath.

The more fiercely the redcoat struggled, the tighter Dick gripped the fellow's throat.

Dick felt that it was only a question of a very short time before the redcoat would succumb.

The fellow could not get his breath, and he certainly could not retain consciousness long unless he were able to breathe.

It turned out as Dick thought it would.

The redcoat gave a sort of gasping groan.

Then his hands dropped, limp and nerveless, to the roof.

Dick knew what this meant.

His opponent had been choked into insensibility.

Dick did not loosen his grip on the fellow's throat, however.

He wished to make assurance doubly sure.

He waited a few moments.

Then he relaxed his grasp somewhat.

Next he let go his hold of the man's throat and took hold of his coat-collar.

"I don't wish to be responsible for the fellow's death," thought Dick. "I'll ease his body down until it rests

against one of the dormer windows. He'll be safe there till he comes to, I guess."

Dick did this.

Then he climbed back up to and over the peak, and made his way down to the corner where the wooden water-pipe extended down to the ground.

Dick looked down into the back yard.

The half dozen redcoats were still there.

Dick had a possible plan of escape outlined in his mind.

He now proceeded to put the first part of his plan into execution.

Dick leaned out over the edge of the roof and called out:

"Hello, down there!"

The sound of startled exclamations came up to Dick's ears.

It was a still, clear night, and all sounds could be heard with distinctness.

"Hello!" called back a voice. "Who are you, and what are you doing up on the roof?"

Dick had sized his recent opponent up pretty closely.

He believed that the unconscious officer was General Stirling, so he replied:

"I am General Stirling."

Dick had taken note of the man's voice and did his best to imitate it.

The imposition was not detected by those in the yard below.

"What do you wish, General Stirling?" one of the men called up.

"I wish some help."

"You wish some help?"

"Yes."

"In what way can we help you? What do you wish us to do?"

"I wish you to come up here."

"Up there?"

The man's tone denoted surprise.

"Yes."

"All of us?"

"Yes, all of you."

"How are we to get up there?"

"Go into the house and come up the stairs."

"Very well, sir, but—have you found the spy?"

"You'll find out when you come up here."

"All right; we'll be up in a minute."

"Good! I'll meet you in the attic."

Dick watched closely and saw the men disappear in the shadow of the trees at the side of the building.

Dick waited but a very few moments.

"I must be getting down from here," he thought. "It

won't take those fellows long to get up here, and if they should get hold of me it wouldn't be healthy for me."

Dick lowered himself over the edge of the roof, carefully.

He made his way down the wooden water-pipe.

It was slow and difficult work.

Down he went until within ten feet of the ground.

Then as he heard a shout from above, he let go his hold and dropped to the ground.

"They have found the insensible officer!" was the thought which flashed through Dick's mind.

As Dick struck the ground he was treated to a surprise.

Four men darted out from among the trees and rushed toward Dick.

"So only a couple of the fellows went upstairs," was the thought that flashed through Dick's mind.

The fact of the matter was that all had started to go upstairs, but had met General Howe, and he had sent four of them back to keep watch at the rear.

The result was that they were there ready to rush upon Dick when he reached the ground.

Dick would not allow himself to be captured now, however, if such a thing as escape was possible.

He leaped away in an attempt to avoid the redcoats.

He found it impossible to do so.

They spread out and headed him off.

Seeing that he could not avoid them, Dick met the attack of the fellows.

But shot first his right then his left fist.

Crack! Whack!

Down went two of the redcoats.

The other two managed to get hold of Dick, but he threw them off.

They did not fall, but before they could recover their balance, Dick was away.

He darted around the corner of the house.

He ran toward the gate which opened upon the street.

He had not taken half a dozen leaps before the redcoats were in full pursuit.

They uttered wild yells as they ran.

"The spy! The spy!" they cried. "Head him off! Stop him!"

Their cries were heard.

Four or five men came through the gate toward which Dick was running, and ran forward, directly toward the youth.

He was between two fires.

Dick did the only thing possible for him to do.

He turned sharp to the right and ran in that direction.

Dick knew that there was quite a large yard there.

He thought he might be able to dodge his enemies.

He would try, at any rate.

He ran onward as swiftly as he could.

After him came the redcoats.

Presently Dick came to a high, stone wall.

How was he to get over it, he asked himself.

He had no time to debate the question.

He must get over it at once or he must give up the idea of doing so at all, and try to escape in some other direction.

He could hear the redcoats coming.

They were evidently close at hand.

Suddenly an inspiration came to Dick.

Why not climb a tree and get from the tree to the top of the wall.

No sooner thought of than put into execution.

Selecting a tree beside which he stood, Dick quickly climbed it.

He stepped out on a limb which extended over the stone wall.

He stepped down on the wall.

At this instant a voice called out:

"There he is! Shoot him! Don't let him get away!"

Dick realized that he did not have an instant to spare.

He leaped down upon the other side.

As he did so the crack! crack! crack! of several pistol shots were heard.

Fortunately for Dick, the shots were fired an instant too late.

Dick fell to his hands and knees when he struck the ground, but he was up and away again in an instant.

He was on one of the cross streets.

Realizing that he was still in danger, Dick ran down the street with all his might.

He knew that where he could go, others could go.

He did not doubt that his pursuers would climb trees and follow him over the stone wall.

They did so.

Dick had not gone fifty yards before the redcoats were over the wall and coming after him at full speed.

It was a lively race.

Encouraged by the knowledge of the fact that his chances for making his escape were much better now than they had been a few minutes before, Dick raced ahead with confidence.

Dick led his pursuers a merry chase.

He slowly but surely drew away from them.

He turned corner after corner.

The redcoats kept after Dick, with commendable perseverance.

It did them no good, however.

He disappeared from their sight, finally.

They had lost him.

The redcoats gave utterance to some deep, hearty oaths, and gave up the chase.

As may well be supposed, Dick was well pleased when he saw that he had given his pursuers the slip.

"Jove!" he exclaimed to himself, "that was about as close a call as I ever had. I guess I'm all right now, though. I'll go straight to the livery stable and get Major and start for the patriot encampment. The quicker I get the news to General Washington, the better; as the redcoats may decide to make the attack on Fort Mercer sooner than they intended, owing to the fact of their knowing that their plans were overheard."

Thirty minutes later Dick was riding out of Philadelphia, bound for the patriot encampment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" ARRIVE AT FORT MERCER.

Dick reached the patriot encampment at Whitemarsh without further adventure.

Immediately after breakfast next morning he went to headquarters and made his report to General Washington. The commander-in-chief listened with interest.

"You did well, Dick," he said.

"It would have been better if my presence in General Howe's headquarters had not been discovered," said Dick.

"True, but that was something which you could not avoid. What you have learned will be of immense value to me, however."

"I hope so, your excellency."

"Oh, there is no doubt of it. We know now what General Howe intends trying to do. The only thing we don't know is the exact date on which he will make the attempt to capture Fort Mercer. They will change the date, now that they know their talk was overheard."

"So they will; and, no doubt, they will make it at an earlier day than the one they had decided upon."

"It is likely that they will do so."

Washington pondered a few moments, then he looked at Dick.

He started to say something and then hesitated.

He seemed to be debating something in his mind.

Presently he spoke.

"Dick," he said, "I would like to hold Forts Mercer and Mifflin if possible, but I fear it isn't. It is worth trying

however, and I do not intend to give the forts up without a struggle. If we can hold the forts, we can prevent supplies from reaching the British, and eventually we could starve them out."

"True, sir."

The commander-in-chief looked at Dick in a speculative manner, and then said, somewhat hesitatingly:

"Dick, how would you like to take your 'Liberty Boys' and go over and help defend Fort Mercer?"

Dick started.

His eyes glowed.

"I should like it first-rate, your excellency," he exclaimed. "Indeed, I should like nothing better. The boys will be delighted to go, I am sure."

"I dislike to send you into such a dangerous place, Dick, but the fort is not large and will not hold a great many. This is a place where it must be quality rather than quantity, which is the reason I have thought of sending you and your 'Liberty Boys.'"

Dick flushed with pleasure.

"Thank you," he said; "we shall be very glad to go and help defend the fort."

"Good! the matter is settled, then."

"When shall we start, sir?"

"As soon as you can get ready."

"That will be within the hour."

"There's no great hurry, Dick; I would suggest that you take your time about starting."

"An hour will be sufficient, your excellency, and the sooner we are away the better; it will take nearly all day for us to reach Fort Mercer the way we will have to go."

"Which will be the best way to go to reach there, Dick?"

Dick pondered a few moments.

"Let's see; Fort Mercer is on the east side of the Delaware, is it not?"

"Yes, it is on the Jersey side."

"I guess the best way for us to go will be to strike the river somewhere above Philadelphia; we can cross over, and ride down the east bank of the river till we reach the fort."

"I judge that will be as good a plan as any," agreed General Washington.

The two conversed for a few minutes longer.

General Washington gave Dick such instructions as he thought necessary.

Then the youth bade the commander-in-chief good-by, and, saluting, withdrew.

When Dick returned to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys" and told them that they were to go at once to Fort Mercer, the youths were delighted.

"Hurrah!" cried Bob Estabrook. "That is just the kind of work I like."

"And I!" from Mark Morrison.

A number of the "Liberty Boys" said the same.

Indeed, it was evident that all were pleased.

"How soon will we start, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Just as soon as we can get ready."

"Hurrah! I'm ready now."

The "Liberty Boys" began making preparations for their trip.

There was not much to do.

All that was necessary was to look after their arms and ammunition.

When they had done this, the youths went out and bridled and saddled their horses.

They did not delay.

Mounting their horses they rode out of the patriot encampment.

They headed in an easterly direction toward the Delaware River.

An hour later they reached the river.

There was a ferryboat at this point.

The boat was owned by a patriot.

Dick had crossed the river here several times in the past.

The ferryman said that he would take Dick's party across.

His boat was not large, however.

The most the boat would hold was eight horses and men.

This would necessitate the making of a dozen trips.

The work of transferring the "Liberty Boys" from one side of the river to the other was begun at once.

The ferryman worked hard.

Dick told him that they wished to get across as quickly as possible.

The work was not finished, and the last boat-load landed on the Jersey side, until nearly three o'clock.

It had taken more than six hours of steady work to get the hundred youths and horses across the river.

Dick paid the ferryman for his work, and then the youths mounted and rode away.

They rode in a southerly direction.

All they had to do now was to follow along the east bank of the river.

They were beginning to be hungry.

As they still had quite a ride before them, Dick decided that they would get something to eat.

At each farmhouse that they came to, twelve of the "Liberty Boys" stopped.

At the ninth house they came to, Dick, Bob, Mark Morrison and Sam Sanderson stopped.

The woman of the house prepared a very good meal, and the youths ate heartily.

It was nearly five o'clock when the "Liberty Boys" finally came together again at the house where Dick and his companions had stopped.

The party rode onward in a southerly direction.

It was seven o'clock when Fort Mercer was reached.

When close upon the fort the youths were halted by a sentinel.

Dick rode forward to speak to the sentinel.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the sentinel asked.

"I am a patriot and a friend," replied Dick.

"What is your name?"

"Dick Slater."

"What!" the sentinel exclaimed. "Not Dick Slater, the captain of the 'Liberty Boys'?"

"The same; and those are my 'Liberty Boys' that you see, yonder. I wish to see Colonel Greene, commander of the fort."

"I will send for the officer of the guard at once, and he will show you into Colonel Greene's presence."

"Thank you."

The sentinel called the officer of the guard, and when the man came, Dick explained what it was he wished.

"Come with me," the officer of the guard said.

Dick had dismounted before advancing to speak to the sentinel.

He accompanied the man into the fort.

He was conducted to Colonel Greene's quarters.

The commander of the fort greeted Dick, pleasantly.

"So you are the commander of 'The Liberty Boys of '76,' are you?" he asked, eyeing Dick with interest.

"I am," replied Dick.

"What can I do for you?"

"The shoe is on the other foot," said Dick, with a smile.

The officer looked surprised.

"How is that?" he asked.

"It is this way: My 'Liberty Boys' are here with me, and we have come to help you hold the fort. The commander-in-chief sent us."

Colonel Greene's face lighted up.

"Say you so!" he exclaimed. "That is good news, indeed. Your 'Liberty Biys' are outside, you say?"

"Yes."

Colonel Greene turned to the officer of the guard.

"Conduct this man's force into the fort at once," he ordered.

"One moment," said Dick. "We came here on horseback. There is not room here for the horses, nor is there

feed for them. The question is, what is to be done with the animals?"

A puzzled look appeared on Colonel Greene's face.

He looked at the floor and pondered.

Then he looked up.

"I'll tell you what to do," he said. "There is a farmhouse about a quarter of a mile distant down the river. The owner of the place is a patriot, and I think he will let you turn your horses into his field. You can try the plan, at any rate."

"Very well, I will do so."

Dick saluted and withdrew.

He made his way out of the fort and back to where the "Liberty Boys" were awaiting him.

Dick told the youths what Colonel Greene had said.

Then he mounted his horse and led the way in the direction of the farmhouse.

It was now quite dark, but they had no difficulty in finding the farmhouse.

The owner of the house came out in response to a call from Dick.

When Dick explained who they were and what they wished, the man seemed delighted.

"You can leave your horses here and welcome," he said. "I have a large cornfield in which I am pasturing my own horses, and you can turn yours right in with mine; you can leave them as long as you like, and I will look after them and see that they are well taken care of."

"Thank you," said Dick. "You are very kind, and your kindness is appreciated, I assure you."

"Oh, that is all right," was the reply. "I am a patriot and am glad of an opportunity of doing something to aid the great cause."

The man showed the youths which way to go, and they led their horses into the pasture.

They took off the saddles and bridles and turned the horses loose.

They carried the saddles and bridles to the barn and placed them up in the haymow.

Dick explained to the man that they might wish to get their horses in a hurry when they did get them.

"I understand that," the man replied; "and it is all right. Just rout me out at any time of the day or night, and I will help you all I can and will assist you in getting your horses and getting away."

Dick thanked the man, earnestly, and then the youths made their way back to the fort.

There was considerable excitement among the soldiers at the fort.

They had heard of the arrival of Dick and his "Liberty Boys."

The majority of them had heard many stories regarding Dick Slater and his band of "Liberty Boys."

They had heard of Dick's adventures as a spy, and of the wonderful valor and fighting abilities of the "Liberty Boys" on the battlefield.

They were eager to see the youths.

When the "Liberty Boys" filed into the fort they were greeted with a cheer.

"Three cheers for Dick Slater and 'The Liberty Boys of '76!'" was the cry.

The youths were well pleased with their reception.

They were soon mingling with the soldiers and getting acquainted.

The "Liberty Boys" were quick to make friends.

They were free and easy, good-natured and jolly, and those with whom they came in contact could not help liking them.

Dick made his way to the quarters occupied by Colonel Greene, commander of the fort.

He spent an hour or so there, talking.

He delivered some verbal instructions which General Washington had sent.

He told General Greene that the fort was to be attacked, and that the attack probably would not be long delayed.

Colonel Greene was glad to receive the information and the instructions.

He now knew what to expect.

The work of strengthening the defenses of the fort was begun next morning.

The men worked steadily all day long that day and each succeeding day for nearly a week.

They lived in constant expectation of an attack from the British.

The "Liberty Boys" had been there five days and still no attack had been made.

"I do not understand it," Colonel Greene said, in speaking to Dick of the matter.

"Neither do I," the youth replied. "I was confident that they would make an attack before this time."

"But they haven't, and I don't understand it. I would give a good deal to know why the attack has not been made."

Dick gave a start.

"Have you a boat here?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Good! Then I will go up to the city to-night to find out why the attack has not been made."

"Oh, but that will be too dangerous."

"I don't think it will be very dangerous."

The officer insisted that it would, and tried to dissuade Dick.

But the youth would not be dissuaded.

He was determined to go.

Seeing that this was the case, Colonel Greene gave in, and said that Dick might go.

As soon as it was dark enough so that his action could not be seen, Dick left the fort and made his way down to the water's edge, and, getting into a boat, rowed away up the river.

CHAPTER VII.

BACK IN PHILADELPHIA.

It was quite a task rowing the boat up the river.

The current of the river was quite strong.

Dick was an expert rower, however.

He was strong and hardy, also, and was enabled to keep steadily at work.

At last he reached Philadelphia.

He rowed along until he came to a point where he could go in under the wharf.

Not knowing how long he might remain in the city, Dick tied the boat securely.

He tied the painter to a post well in under the wharf, and then pulling the boat back till the stern was almost even with the outer edge of the wharf, Dick fastened it in this position with a piece of rope he found in the stern.

This done, Dick pulled himself up over the edge of the wharf and was soon making his way up from the river bank.

Dick hardly knew which way to go.

He would have to be governed by circumstances.

He believed that if he made his way about the streets of the city, and listened to the conversation of the redcoats, he would learn why it was that the attack on Fort Mercer had not yet been made.

The part of the city in which Dick found himself was new to him.

He had visited Philadelphia several times in the pursuit of his work as a spy, but had not been in that part of the city fronting on the river—at least not to a point so far down the stream as where he had just landed.

Dick kept the general direction well in mind, and walked onward.

He walked northward and eastward.

Half an hour later he was down in the heart of the city.

Dick was walking slowly along, keeping an eye out for redcoats and listening to the talk of such groups as he happened to encounter, when suddenly he felt some one tap him on the shoulder.

Dick turned quickly.

A man dressed in a British uniform stood before him.

Dick eyed the fellow, keenly.

The youth's first thought was that he had been recognized.

He dismissed this thought, quickly, there being no light of recognition in the man's eyes.

This relieved Dick's mind somewhat.

"You tapped me on the shoulder?" asked Dick.

"I did," was the reply.

"What do you want?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"What do you want with me?"

"I want to see you."

"Well, you see me, don't you?"

A frown appeared on the face of the redcoat.

"I mean that I wish to speak with you," he said.

"You do?"

"Yes."

Dick looked surprised.

"Aren't you mistaken?" he asked.

"No."

"You must be. You don't know me."

"I know I don't know you, but that doesn't matter. I wish to have a little talk with you, anyway."

"Well, go ahead."

"Oh, I don't want to talk to you here."

"Not here, eh?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"In private."

Dick was surprised.

"Is it so important as all that?" he asked.

"It is."

Dick wondered what it was the fellow could want with him.

He was inclined to accompany the fellow, yet did not just like the idea, either.

The youth hesitated.

The redcoat noticed this.

"Come," he said, "if you are a friend of the king, you must not refuse; and if you are not a friend of the king,

you have no business running at large on the streets of Philadelphia."

Dick thought that he might learn something of value if he went with the redcoat, and made up his mind to do so.

He thought it would do no harm to be cautious, however.

"Where do you wish me to go? How far is it from here?" he asked.

"Only a short distance."

"Does that mean a mile, or half a mile?"

"No, just a few blocks."

Dick nodded his head.

"Very well," he said, "I will go along with you. Lead the way."

"Come!"

The man led the way down the street.

He went straight ahead a distance of perhaps three blocks, and then he turned to the right.

At about the middle of the block he paused and descended a short flight of steps, leading to a half-basement.

He gave a peculiar rap on the door and it was opened with but slight delay.

The redcoat stepped to one side and motioned for Dick to enter.

It was dark beyond the doorway.

Dick hesitated to enter.

Naturally enough, he was slightly suspicious.

He feared he might be walking into a trap.

His companion noticed Dick's hesitation.

"Enter," he said. "If you are a friend of the king, you need have no fear."

Dick made up his mind to risk it.

There was a chance that he might learn something.

He stepped through the doorway into the basement.

He was on the alert, however.

He knew that there must be some one there.

The door had been opened from the inside, and the person who had opened it must be close at hand.

Dick half expected that he would be attacked.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

Dick's companion followed him through the doorway and closed the door.

"Come," he said.

He took Dick by the arm and led him quite a distance along what seemed to be a hallway.

Then his companion paused, Dick doing likewise, of course.

The redcoat rapped on what was evidently a door.

Almost immediately a voice asked:

"Who comes there?"

"One of the faithful," was the reply.

"Are you alone?"

"No."

"Who comes with you?"

"A friend to the king."

"Good! Enter."

A door was thrown open, revealing a lighted room beyond.

There were a number of men in the room.

The redcoat pushed Dick forward, into the room.

"Put on a bold face," he whispered. "Don't be afraid."

The fellow evidently thought Dick was frightened.

In this he was mistaken.

Dick may have had doubts regarding the wisdom of entering this place, but he certainly was not afraid.

He entered the room, and, pausing, looked around him.

There was perhaps a score of men in the room.

All wore British uniforms.

The men eyed Dick with an air of interest.

The youth's companion closed the door behind him.

"Come with me," he said to Dick.

He walked across the room without a word to or a glance toward the men present.

At the farther end of the room was a raised platform.

On the platform was a chair.

In front of the platform was a bench.

When they came to the bench, the man told Dick to sit down.

Dick did so.

The man took a seat in the chair on the raised platform.

There was a small table in front of the chair.

The man rapped on the table with his knuckles.

The men all turned their attention in the direction of the man in the chair.

"Men," he said, "we have here to-night a new candidate for admittance to our ranks. I——"

"Hold!" cried Dick, interrupting. "You must not be too hasty. I did not tell you that I wished to join your ranks, did I?"

"Well, no, not exactly, but——"

"There are no 'buts' about it. I simply came along with you because you insisted upon it. I did not say that I wished to become a member of your organization, whatever it may be."

"You said you were a friend of the king."

"Yes, I said that."

"Did you mean it?"

"Yes, I meant it. But that was not saying that I wished to join any organization of any kind."

"You intimated that you would do so."

"Begging your pardon, but I did nothing of the kind."

"I so understood you.

"Then you misunderstood me."

The man was silent a few moments.

He looked around at the men in the room, and then looked at Dick.

"Well, it doesn't make any difference," he said, in a stern and somewhat bullying tone. "You are here, now, and you will have to join our ranks whether you wish to or not."

Dick looked the fellow straight in the eyes.

"So that is your game, is it?" he asked, quietly.

"It isn't my 'game,'" was the reply; "it is a simple statement of fact."

"Let me ask you a question," said Dick.

"Go ahead."

"What is this organization of yours?"

"We are organizing a regiment from among the loyal men of Philadelphia."

"A regiment, eh?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you are to be the colonel of the regiment."

The man flushed, slightly.

"I am one of the leaders in the matter, and it would only be natural if I were to be appointed an officer. If General Howe should see fit to do so, I certainly should not object."

"I should judge not," remarked Dick, drily.

The sarcasm in Dick's tone was so evident that the man became angry.

"You are insolent!" he said, angrily. "But that is neither here nor there; the matter stands this way: The people of America have rebelled against their king. They are fighting against him. It is an exceedingly serious matter and it is the duty of every loyal citizen to join the ranks, shoulder arms and go out and fight the rebels."

"Quite a speech," said Dick, drily. "What next?"

The man frowned even more angrily.

"I will tell you how I look at the matter," he went on.

"I look at it in this way: In my opinion, he who is not for the king is against him. Is not that the way you look at it, men?" raising his voice slightly.

"It is!" came back in a chorus.

The man nodded, approvingly.

Then he addressed Dick directly.

"Say that you will join us, and fight under the banner of the king, or——"

"What?"

"You will have to take the consequences."

"What will be the consequences?"

"Death!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK OVERCOMES A BULLY.

The man spoke in an impressive tone of voice.

He looked at Dick, closely.

It was evident that he expected his words to have considerable effect on Dick.

The youth was cool and calm, however.

If he was worried by the man's words, he did not show it.

Seeing that the man and his comrades expected him to say something, Dick remarked:

"Oh, I guess you would hardly kill a fellow for refusing to join you."

"Oh, but we will!" the man declared. "If you refuse to join us and fight for the king, we shall consider that you are not for him. If you are not for him, you are against him; if you are against him, you are a traitor. And the penalty for being a traitor is death!"

Dick eyed the fellow, closely.

He made up his mind that the man was really in earnest.

Murmurs of approval of the man's speech had gone up from the other men, and the youth realized that they, too, were in favor of inflicting the death penalty if he refused to join them.

Dick hardly knew what to do.

He realized that he was helpless.

It would be folly to attempt resistance.

He might kill two or three of the fellows, but the others would make an end of him.

This would not be satisfactory, at all.

"I don't think you state the matter correctly," said Dick. "Because a man does not wish to join the army and fight, is no reason for branding him a traitor and condemning him to death. Not half the loyal king's men have joined the king's army, and one half of them will do so."

"They will if we get hold of them," was the significant reply.

Dick frowned.

"Don't you think you are acting in rather a high-handed manner?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, I do. You have no right whatever to bring me here and try to force me to join you."

The man laughed.

"You shouldn't have come," he said.

"I wouldn't have come if you hadn't lied to me," retorted Dick.

The man's face flushed, angrily.

A growl of rage escaped him.

"Do you mean to tell me I lie!" he cried.

He glared at Dick, fiercely.

"I do," replied Dick. "You are a liar, and the biggest kind of one! You got me here under false pretences. Had you told me what you really wanted with me I would not have come."

The man leaped to his feet.

"You insolent young scoundrel!" he grated. "You will take back what you have just said, or——"

"Or what?"

"I will give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life."

This talk just suited Dick.

He had a grudge against the fellow.

If he could get to settle the score which he owed the man he would feel very much better.

Dick was a youth who never felt satisfied until he had paid his debts.

It happened that the redcoat was a sort of bully.

He was a big, strong fellow, and he had a high opinion of his prowess.

It had angered him greatly to be talked to in such a manner, in the presence of the other men.

Like most bullies, he was always on the lookout for a chance to prove his fighting abilities.

Here was a chance.

When the man said he would give Dick the worst thrashing he ever had in his life, the youth laughed in a scornful manner.

"Bah!" he said. "I would like to see you make the attempt."

"You think I can't thrash you?"

"I am sure of it."

The man laughed, sneeringly.

"You must have a high opinion of yourself," he said.

Dick nodded.

"You are right, I have."

"And you really think you can hold your own against me?"

The man was so surprised that he almost forgot his anger.

"I not only think it, but I am sure of it. You're one of those blustering, bullying sort of fellows, and they do most of their fighting with their mouth."

This brought back the man's anger.

He flared up again.

"Zounds!" he cried. "I will listen to no more of this. Your insolence entitles you to a good thrashing, and I am going to give it to you. Get up off that bench before I

knock you off. I don't want to strike a man who is sitting down."

"You're slightly different from most bullies," replied Dick, calmly.

As he spoke he quietly rose to his feet.

"Shove the bench out of the way!" the man ordered, addressing one of the men.

The man stepped forward, and, lifting the bench, placed it against the wall at one side of the room.

"Now, young fellow, look out for yourself!" the redcoat cried, "for I am going to give you one of the worst thrashings you ever had!"

"You said that before," said Dick, quietly.

As he spoke, the youth stepped back three or four paces.

"Yes, I said it before, and I meant every word of it, too."

The man advanced, threateningly, as he spoke.

He threw himself in position for making an attack.

Dick seemed to be careless.

He stood still, with his arms hanging down at his sides.

But the youth was not careless.

He was very much on his guard.

He was watching the man closely.

The redcoat took two or three steps forward and then gave a sudden leap and struck out at the youth, with all his might.

Dick did not raise his arms at all, but gave a quick leap backward.

The result was that the man's fist did not reach Dick.

The force of the blow caused the man to lose his balance, and he pitched forward and would undoubtedly have fallen upon his face had not Dick caught him by the shoulders and given him a lift and a strong push.

The lift straightened the man up, and the push sent him reeling backward several paces.

He came very near losing his balance and falling, but, by an effort, caught himself in time.

The spectators were amazed.

The majority of them knew that their leader was a dangerous man in a combat of this kind.

They had expected to see him knock the youth senseless at a single blow.

Indeed, the blow he had struck, had it landed, would have done this.

But it had not landed.

"Try again," remarked Dick, quietly; "perhaps you may do better next time."

A hoarse growl escaped the man.

Again he rushed forward.

It was evident, judging by the look on his face, that he was determined that this time he would not fail.

When he was within striking distance of Dick he began striking out rapidly and fiercely, with both fists.

He did not strike hard enough to over-balance himself.

The first experience had been sufficient.

Now Dick began using his arms.

He warded off the other's blows with apparent ease.

The youth's eyes were true, and his arms quick.

In spite of all the fellow could do, Dick managed to keep out of harm's way.

The redcoats sitting around watched the combat, with wondering gaze.

They did not know what to think.

They had expected to see the youth go down at once.

Now, however, they began to think their comrade had caught a Tartar.

Doubtless the man himself began to think so.

He had struck at Dick a score of times, but had as yet failed to touch him.

The redcoat was becoming tired.

He was not used to so much exertion.

His blows became slower and weaker.

Dick began to think that it was time for him to do something.

Suddenly he did do something.

He brushed the redcoat's arms aside, with a sweep of his left arm.

Then his right shot out and his fist caught the redcoat fair in the chest.

It was a terrible blow.

Dick had put all his force into it.

The redcoat was carried off his feet as if he had been struck with a pile driver.

He went down upon the floor, flat upon his back.

He struck with a crash and a jar that almost shook the building.

A long-drawn-out "Ah-h-h-h-h!" escaped the spectators.

"Great guns!" exclaimed one fellow, "what a lick!"

They were a surprised lot of men.

Doubtless Dick's opponent was surprised.

In addition, he was temporarily dazed.

He lay there on the floor, where he had fallen, blinking up at the ceiling and gasping for breath.

The terrible blow which Dick had delivered had driven most of the air out of the fellow's lungs, and the shock of the fall had finished the work.

Dick stood with folded arms looking quietly, half-smilingly down upon the fallen man.

He waited until the redcoat had caught his breath and had about recovered from his dazed feeling, and then said:

"Come, come, get up; what are you lying there for?"

The redcoat heard and understood.

Everything came back to him.

He struggled to a sitting posture.

He glared up at Dick.

"Curse you!" he hissed, "I'll fix you for this!"

"I don't think you will," was the youth's calm reply.

"I don't believe you are able to do so."

"I'll show you!"

The fellow struggled on up to his feet.

He was somewhat dizzy even yet.

Dick could have stepped forward and knocked the fellow down, but he would not do a thing like that.

He stood still and waited for the redcoat to recover the full use of his faculties.

He felt that he could stand on the defensive and still inflict sufficient punishment on the man.

He did not have to wait long.

The redcoat soon recovered the full use of himself.

He gave utterance to a hoarse growl of rage, and rushed to the attack.

He struck at the youth a number of times, but Dick saw that the fellow did not seem to care particularly whether the blows landed or not.

Dick divined the other's purpose.

The redcoat having found that he was no match for Dick in the use of the fists, had made up his mind to come to close quarters.

He believed that he was considerably stronger than the youth, and his idea was that if he could come to close quarters he could speedily decide the affair in his favor.

Dick was an accommodating youth.

He decided to let the man have his way.

He would let the fellow accomplish his purpose of coming to close quarters.

Then he would show him a thing or two.

Dick was very strong.

He was an all-around athlete.

He had yet to meet his match at wrestling or in a hand-to-hand encounter.

He did not believe that he would meet his match in this man.

The youth purposely left the opening which he was sure the other was looking for.

The redcoat snapped at the bait.

He took advantage of the opportunity.

He leaped in and seized Dick.

He did not secure exactly the hold he tried to secure.

He supposed this to be merely an accident.

The fact was, however, that Dick, knowing what hold the man would try to secure, had foiled him.

And while doing this, Dick had managed to secure his favorite hold.

When he had secured it, Dick felt perfectly safe.

He could have thrown the redcoat at once, but did not.

He wished to let the fellow exert himself a bit, first.

The man began doing so at once.

He exerted himself to the full limit of his strength.

He did his best to throw the youth.

He could not do it.

The hold which Dick had secured enabled him to nullify the efforts of the other without much difficulty.

The redcoat strained, tugged, grunted and cursed under his breath.

He could not budge Dick an inch.

The other redcoats watched the contest with eager eyes.

Knowing the strength of their comrade, they had expected to see him get the better of the youth very quickly after they had come to close quarters.

They were surprised when he failed to be able to do so.

They were soon to be treated to a still greater surprise, however.

Dick waited till his opponent had about exhausted all his strength, and then he suddenly took the offensive.

He suddenly gave a quick, twisting movement of the body and freed himself from the man's grasp sufficiently so that he was enabled to execute the movement which he had in view.

Then he executed it.

Exerting all his strength, the youth suddenly lifted the redcoat from the floor, and, raising the fellow high above his head, held him there.

Involuntary cries of amazement escaped the lips of the spectators.

They had never seen anything like this before.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FAKE SURRENDER.

A cry of fear escaped the redcoat himself.

He thought Dick was going to throw him down upon the floor.

Such a fall could not but shock him terribly.

The fall might injure him seriously, might even be the death of him.

Like most bullies, he was a coward at heart.

When things are going their way, such fellows do not, of course, show themselves possessed of a lack of courage.

When things go against them, however, the cowardice which is in the majority of them will, as a rule, show itself. It was so in this case.

As we have said, the man uttered a cry of terror.

Then he happened to think of his comrades.

"Help!" he cried. "Quick, boys, don't let him throw me down! Save me!"

"You coward!" exclaimed Dick. "You deserve to have your neck broken!"

He turned his head and saw a dozen of the men rushing forward.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Dick gave the man a swing and threw him against the advancing men, with great force.

Three or four of them went down in a heap, with the fellow on top of them.

Dick thought it possible that he might escape during the confusion.

He ran to the door.

It was locked.

The key was in the lock, however.

Dick turned the key.

He jerked the door open.

He leaped through the doorway.

A number of the redcoats had leaped forward, and as Dick leaped through the doorway they grabbed at him.

They did not succeed in getting hold of him.

There was another door a few feet beyond the first one, and before Dick could get it open the redcoats were upon him.

He struggled fiercely.

It was of no avail.

There were too many of the fellows for him.

They soon succeeded in making him a prisoner.

They tied Dick's arms together behind his back and seated him on the bench at the side of the room.

The leader of the redcoats, the man whom Dick had handled so severely, was very angry.

He threatened that he would get even with Dick.

He said that he would settle with him in full, later on.

Then he took his seat in the chair on the raised platform.

He called the men to him, one after another, and said something to each of them.

He spoke in such a low tone that Dick could not hear what was said.

One after another the men left the room.

When all save the leader had gone, he turned to Dick and said:

"I'll come back and settle with you, presently. I have some other business to attend to at present."

"Don't hurry on my account," Dick said, coolly.

The redcoat grunted.

He blew out the lights and left the room.

Dick listened, but did not hear the key turn in the lock.

"I guess he thinks I am tied so tight I can't get away, anyway," thought Dick. "I'll see if I can get my hands loose. If I can, I'll get out of here or know the reason why."

Dick began working at his bonds.

The redcoats had not bound him very securely.

Doubtless they were green hands at this kind of work.

It did not take him long to loosen the ropes sufficiently so that he could slip his hands out.

As soon as his hands were free he made his way across the room to the door.

It was dark, but he had no trouble in finding the door.

To his great satisfaction the door was unlocked.

He opened it and passed through the doorway.

He feared the other door would be locked.

But it was not.

"It was very kind of Mr. Redcoat to leave these doors unlocked," thought Dick. "I'm much obliged to him."

Dick opened the door and passed through into the hall.

It was dark in the hall, but the youth had no trouble in making his way along it.

He reached the front door and found it locked.

The key was in the lock, however, and, turning it, Dick opened the door.

He stepped through the doorway, pulled the door shut behind him, and ascending the short flight of steps, made his way down the street.

He kept a sharp lookout around him, but did not see any of the men who had been in the room from which he had just escaped.

Dick walked the streets of Philadelphia until nearly midnight, without having learned much of importance.

Somewhat disappointed, he entered a tavern, paid for a room and went to bed.

After breakfast next morning he started out again.

He learned nothing of importance until just after noon, and then, having made his way down to the river front, he saw a lot of British soldiers crossing the river in boats.

"What does that men?" asked Dick of a man. "Where are those soldiers going?"

"They're going over to Jersey and then down the river a ways, I understand," was the reply.

"What are they going down there for?"

"They're going to capture Fort Mercer."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

Dick turned away.

Here was news, indeed.

A thought struck him and he turned back to where the man stood.

"Do you know how many of the British there are?" he asked.

"About twenty-five hundred, I understand."

Again Dick turned away.

He did not go far, however.

Selecting a favorable position, he stationed himself there and watched until the British had all crossed the river.

Then he walked away.

Dick's work was now cut out for him.

He must return to Fort Mercer and inform Colonel Greene of the fact that the British were advancing upon the fort.

Dick knew that there was no particular need of haste, however.

The British soldiers would not be able to reach Fort Mercer that afternoon.

This would give him plenty of time, as he could get in his boat and row back down to Fort Mercer with comparative quickness.

Dick waited till after nightfall.

He ate his supper at a tavern and then made his way to the wharf where he had left the boat the night before.

He found his boat where he had left it.

It had not been molested.

Getting into the boat, he untied the painter, and, pushing out from under the wharf, rowed away down the river.

He arrived at Fort Mercer safely.

He went to Colonel Greene at once and made his report.

The officer listened, quietly.

"So they are coming, are they?" he remarked, when Dick had finished. "Well, let them come. Forewarned is fore-armed, and now that we know of their coming we will be enabled to make preparations to receive them."

"True," agreed Dick.

Then a thought struck the youth.

"I'll tell you what you do, Colonel Greene," said the youth; "let me and my 'Liberty Boys' go to Timber Creek early in the morning and destroy the bridge. The British will then have to march four miles up the stream before they will be able to ford it. That will delay their arrival three or four hours, and will give you more time to get ready for them."

"That is a good idea," said Greene. "I will detail you to do that work."

"Thank you, sir," said Dick; "we will do that work, and we will fall back toward the fort, slowly, and will retard the advance of the British, if possible."

"Very well, Dick; be careful, however, and don't let them catch you."

"We'll be careful," replied Dick, with a smile. "If there is any capturing done, we will try to be the ones to do it."

The youths were up before daylight next morning.

Rather than go to the trouble of going into the farmer's fields and catching their horses, the youths decided to walk.

It was a cool morning, and the youths walked briskly.

They reached Timber Creek just as the sun was coming up.

They had brought a couple of axes along, and a half hour's work sufficed to destroy the bridge.

They sent it floating down the stream just as the advance guard of the British force came in sight, a mile away, up the road.

"There they come!" cried Bob Estabrook. "Well, let them. I guess they won't get across here."

"That's right," agreed Dick. "They'll have to march four or five miles up stream before they can get across."

The youths now started on the return march.

When they were within about a mile of Fort Mercer, Dick ordered a halt.

They were in a little clump of timber through which the road ran.

At one side of the road was a rail fence.

Growing along the fence were clumps of bushes.

Dick's quick eyes took in the situation.

"That would make a splendid place for an ambuscade," he remarked.

Then he told the "Liberty Boys" to climb over the fence and hide behind the bushes.

The youths obeyed.

"I have a plan," Dick said. "You boys remain here till I return; I will not be gone long."

"All right," replied Bob.

Dick hastened away.

He did not go to the fort.

Instead, he made his way to the home of the farmer where they had left their horses.

He told the farmer that he wished to get his horse, and getting his bridle and saddle, went out into the field and caught Major and bridled and saddled him.

Mounting Major, Dick rode back to where he had left the "Liberty Boys."

He told them his plan.

"I wish to capture some of the redcoats, if I can," he said; "and I believe that by making use of a ruse, we may be able to do so."

"What sort of a ruse are you going to make use of?" asked Bob.

"I'll tell you: I am going to secrete myself back here in the timber a ways and wait until the advance guard of the British has almost reached the point where you boys are hidden. Then I shall ride out into the road and gallop forward. I will pretend not to see the British until I am at a point opposite you boys, and then I will stop my horse, dismount, throw my arms on the ground and pretend to surrender. The redcoats will think I am a patriot messenger from the fort and will rush forward, eager to make me a prisoner. If there are not too many of them, say twenty-five or fifty, you boys must surround them quickly and force them to surrender. If there should be seventy-five or a hundred of them you will simply attack them and put them to rout."

The "Liberty Boys" were right in for this.

It was the kind of work they liked.

They had a long wait before them, however.

The redcoats had not put in an appearance at noon, and the youths, dividing up into small parties, took turns at going to the fort and getting something to eat.

It was two o'clock when the advance guard of the British put in an appearance.

There were about twenty of the redcoats and they were on horseback.

Dick did just as he had planned.

He waited until the British dragoons were within a quarter of a mile of where the "Liberty Boys" were concealed, and then he rode out of the timber and galloped up the road.

He was looking down at the ground and ostensibly had no knowledge of the presence of the redcoats.

When about even with where the "Liberty Boys" were concealed, Dick looked up, pretended to see the redcoats for the first time, and then reined his horse to a standstill.

He looked toward each side of the road and behind him as if trying to see what chance there was for escape, and then leaping from his horse he unbuckled his belt and threw it and the weapons it contained onto the ground.

Dick stood in the middle of the road, directly opposite his "Liberty Boys," and, as the British dragoons advanced, threw up his hands and cried:

"I surrender!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORT.

The main force of the British were on foot.

The party of dragoons had come along to act as an advance guard.

They were a mile in advance of the main force.

Dick had taken this into consideration when planning the ruse which was now being played on the redcoats.

The dragoons rode forward at a rapid pace.

They seemed wholly unsuspecting.

They evidently thought they had headed off and were going to capture a messenger from Fort Mercer.

Dick's fake surrender had completely deceived them.

Glancing out of the corner of his eyes Dick saw that his "Liberty Boys" were moving.

"They will do their work all right," he thought. "I think we will be able to capture these fellows without firing a gun."

A few moments later Dick was surrounded by the dragoons.

Naturally, their eyes were upon him.

This was just what Dick wished.

It gave his "Liberty Boys" the opportunity to get in their work.

They climbed the fence and surrounded the redcoats almost before the latter knew what had occurred.

Indeed, the first intimation the redcoats had that they were in danger was when Dick called out, in a loud, ringing voice:

"Surrender, or you are dead men! Hands up, all! The least move toward resistance will be the signal for my men to fire!"

The redcoats started and looked around them.

They saw that they were surrounded by at least a hundred patriots, each and every one of whom held a leveled musket in his hand.

The faces of the redcoats blanched.

They realized that they had run into a trap.

Still they hesitated to obey Dick's command.

It was indeed galling to be taken in this manner.

To be fooled by a ruse of this kind, discomfited them greatly.

Had they been captured in battle it would not have been so bad, but to be forced to surrender without having struck a blow or fired a shot, was anything but pleasing.

Noting that the redcoats hesitated, Dick repeated his command.

"Surrender, or you are dead men! Don't attempt to resist! Hands up, all!"

Dick's tone was grim and threatening.

The redcoats realized that the youth meant what he said.

Slowly and reluctantly they lifted their hands and held them extended above their heads.

"Disarm them!" ordered Dick, addressing the "Liberty Boys."

A score of the youths leaped forward and, reaching up, unbuckled the belts and relieved the redcoats of their weapons.

"Dismount!" ordered Dick.

The redcoats obeyed.

Their arms were quickly bound together behind their backs.

Then, leading the horses, and with the prisoners in their midst, the "Liberty Boys" set out in the direction of the fort.

When they reached the farmhouse where their horses were, a number of the "Liberty Boys" turned aside and led the horses into the field, and after unsaddling and unbridling them, turned them loose.

Dick and the main body of the "Liberty Boys" continued on with the prisoners.

Colonel Greene was surprised when the youths put in an appearance, bringing with them twenty prisoners.

He was delighted as well.

"You have done well," he said. "The ruse which you played on the British was indeed well conceived."

"And was a success!" said Bob.

The prisoners were placed in a secure place and then Dick made his report to Colonel Greene.

"The main force will be here within the hour," said Dick.

"Let them come," said Colonel Greene. "We are ready for them. I have changed all my cannon from the river side of the fort to the landward side, and we will be ready to give the redcoats a warm reception."

As Dick had said, the redcoats put in an appearance when a little less than an hour had elapsed.

The British force consisted almost wholly of Hessians, and they were commanded by Count Donop.

Donop ranged his men in line of battle in the edge of the timber a half mile distant from the fort.

When he had done this he sent an officer toward the fort, the officer carrying a white flag, being accompanied by a drummer-boy.

"Go and meet that man and see what he wants, Dick," ordered Colonel Greene.

Dick bowed, and, leaving the fort, went out and met the man.

Dick was gone only a few minutes.

When he returned, he told Colonel Greene that the commander of the British ordered the defenders of the fort to lay down their arms and surrender, and that if they did not do so, and offered battle, no quarter would be given.

"Go back and tell him that we will neither ask quarter nor will we give any!" ordered Colonel Greene. "We will defend the fort!"

"Very well, sir," replied Dick.

He returned to the Hessian officer and told him what Colonel Greene had said.

The officer at once returned to Donop and reported.

"So be it," said Count Donop; "their blood be on their own heads."

He ordered his cannon to be brought up, and having formed his men, moved to the attack.

He divided his force.

He sent one division to attack the fort on the north side.

The other division approached from the south.

Donop himself was with this division.

The British ships which lay a mile or two down the river now came up stream and as soon as they were within range of the fort, opened fire.

They kept up a fierce fire, but the majority of the cannon-balls went over the fort or buried themselves in the mud at the river's edge.

Donop's men now opened with their cannon and the defenders of the fort were practically between two fires.

Solid shot came from the north and the south.

Many of them struck within the fort, but luckily did not do much damage.

After half an hour or so of brisk cannonading, the Hessians, who were advancing from the north, rushed forward to attack the fort.

They had no difficulty in storming the outworks, for the patriots made no attempt to defend them.

Colonel Greene had wisely decided to keep his entire force in the main fort and not try to hold the outworks.

Not meeting with any resistance, the Hessians were greatly encouraged.

They thought that the fort was as good as taken.

There was no ditch nor obstruction of any kind between the outworks and the main fort, and the Hessians thought that all they would have to do would be to rush up the embankment, plant the British flag there and call upon the "rebels" to surrender.

Their idea was that the fierce cannonading had terrified those in the fort to such an extent that they would not dare lift their hands in the fort's defense.

They were soon to learn their mistake.

Colonel Greene and his men, and Dick and his "Liberty Boys" were very far from being terrified.

The majority of the defenders of the fort were veterans.

They had been under fire too often to be frightened by cannonading, no matter how fierce it might be.

The defenders of the fort waited till the Hessians were almost at the top of the embankment, and then they fired a murderous volley.

The flames from the muzzles of the patriots' muskets flashed full in the faces of the Hessians.

At such close range it was almost impossible to miss the mark aimed at.

Terrible execution was done.

Dozens of the Hessians went down, dead or wounded.

Crash! Roar!

The patriots had fired another volley.

Again many of the Hessians fell.

The majority of them rolled down the embankment to the level ground below.

Curses and cries of consternation went up from the uninjured Hessians.

Shrieks and groans went up from the wounded.

It was a terrible scene.

The Hessians were appalled.

They had not expected such a reception.

Crash! Roar!

Again a volley from the patriots.

The Hessians were brave, but this was too much for them.

They broke and fled in disorder.

Meantime the other division under Count Donop had been advancing from the southward.

They were just ready to advance when the other division retreated.

Donop gave the order to charge, and the Hessians rushed forward.

Colonel Greene and Dick Slater had plenty of time to get their men across from the north side of the fort to the south side, however, and were ready to greet the Hessians.

The Hessians rushed up the embankment in the same fashion as their comrades had done a few minutes before.

And the experience of their comrades was theirs.

When they were almost to the top, the fort's defenders fired a volley.

Crash! Roar!

Dozens of the Hessians went down.

Among those who fell was Count Donop.

The Hessians were brave and determined, however.

They rushed up the embankment and fired almost into the faces of the patriots.

The fire was instantly returned, however, and many of the Hessians went down.

It was a terrible scene.

The Hessians hesitated and wavered.

Another volley decided them.

They turned and fled in the utmost confusion.

Nor did they stop when they had reached a point out of range of the fort's defenders.

They kept right on running.

Their commander and his second in command were both down.

They were lying in the ditch at the bottom of the embankment.

The battle had lasted less than an hour.

It was about five o'clock when the attack began and it was not yet six when it ended.

The Hessians had expected to be in possession of the fort before nightfall.

They had been unable to capture the fort at all, however.

Not only was this the case, but they had been thoroughly and terribly whipped.

Four hundred Hessians had been killed or wounded.

Of the patriots, eight were killed and twenty-nine wounded.

The Hessians had met with a terrible defeat.

The division of the Hessians which had made the attack at the north side of the fort, seeing their comrades who had attacked from the other side, fleeing toward Haddonfield, followed them.

Being anxious to make the affair as thorough a defeat to the British as possible, Dick and his "Liberty Boys" emerged from the fort and gave chase to the fleeing Hessians.

They chased the enemy a mile, at least, but the Hessians were so frightened and ran so swiftly the youths could not overtake them.

They did not care particularly, however; what they wished to do was to frighten the Hessians so bad that

they would not venture to return and renew the attack.

The "Liberty Boys" gave up the chase and returned to the fort.

Feeling sure now that the affair was over and that the Hessians would not return, the patriots emerged from the fort and went down and began gathering up the wounded men and carrying them up into the fort where their wounds could be attended to.

As Dick was moving about among the dead and wounded, a faint voice suddenly accosted him.

"Will you kindly assist me?" the voice said.

"Certainly," replied Dick.

He called Bob to his assistance and they lifted the man and carried him up into the fort.

"Why, that is Count Donop!" exclaimed Colonel Greene as soon as his eyes fell upon the face of the man.

"Yes, I am Count Donop," said the man, faintly, "and I am mortally wounded.

"Oh, perhaps it is not so bad as that," said Dick. "Let us look at your wound."

Dick and Colonel Greene made as good an examination as possible.

They found that the Hessian officer was indeed badly wounded.

Both had had considerable experience and were good judges of such things and they did not believe it possible that the man could live.

In order that he might have the best of care, a rude litter was improvised and Count Donop was taken to the farmhouse.

The owner of the farmhouse was, as has already been stated, a patriot, but he was humane.

He was willing to do all that he could for the wounded man.

A number of the men died before morning, however.

Among them was Count Donop.

When the Hessians returned to Philadelphia and reported that four hundred of their comrades had been killed or wounded, and that Donop, their brave, young commander was one of the slain, General Howe hardly knew what to think.

He was greatly chagrined.

It was a terrible defeat for him, and a great victory for the patriots.

As soon as the news became known, there was great joy among the patriots everywhere.

The splendid work which had been done by Dick Slater and his "Liberty Boys" became known and they came in for a great deal of praise.

They certainly deserved it.

Colonel Greene himself, in his report which he sent to Washington, made the statement that but for the assistance which had been rendered him by the "Liberty Boys," he could not have held the fort and defeated the British.

This information was pleasing to General Washington.

The commander-in-chief held a high opinion of Dick and his "Liberty Boys," and was always glad to hear them praised.

He was delighted by the result of the battle at Fort Mercer, and he congratulated Dick on the good work which he and his comrades had done.

Dick was pleased by the praises from the commander-in-chief, but modestly said that he and his comrades had done only their duty.

The commander-in-chief stated that if they always did their duty as fully as they had done it on this occasion, they would certainly do well.

General Washington soon found more work for the "Liberty Boys" to do.

THE END.

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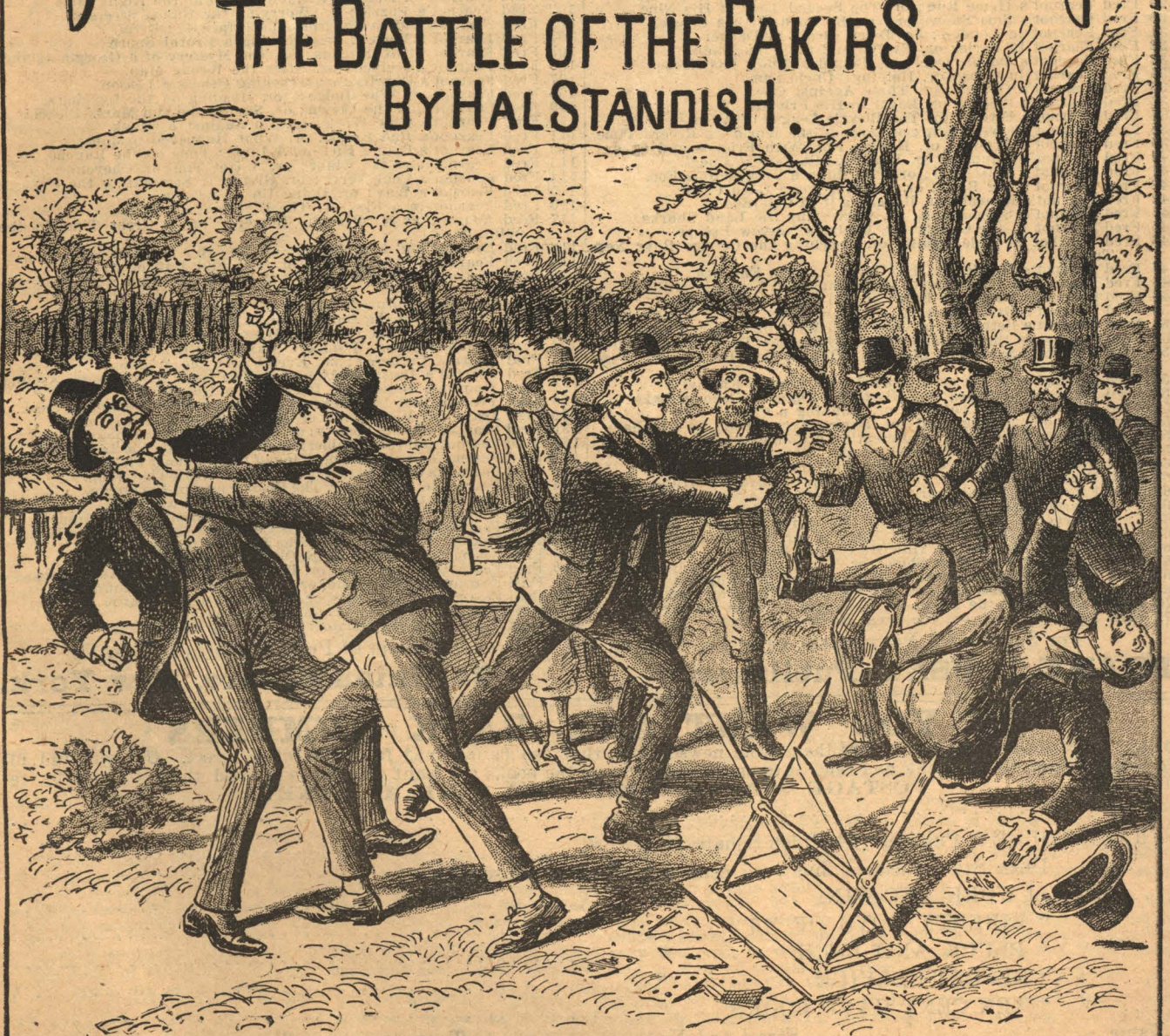
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